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FILE

Babrak Karmal
President and Prime Minister of Afghanistan

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A Biographic Research Paper

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The author of this paper is [redacted] *Near East/Africa Division, Office of Central Reference. Comments and questions may be directed to Chief, Near East/South Asia Branch, on* [redacted]

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BIOGRAPHIC BRIEF

On 27 December 1979 Babrak Karmal was installed as the new Afghan President and Prime Minister after a bloody, Soviet-backed coup. Babrak has been a Communist political agitator since the early 1950s and leader of the Parcham (Banner) faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan since 1967. He is a skilled orator and political tactician, [redacted] A longtime proponent of closer PDPA ties to the USSR, he owes his political survival during the recent turmoil in Afghan politics to Soviet sponsorship. His expressed attitude toward the United States has always followed the Soviet line. [redacted]

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BABRAK Karmal **AFGHANISTAN**
(Phonetic: baBRUCK)

President, Revolutionary Council; Prime Minister (since December 1979)

Babrak Karmal was installed as leader of Afghanistan on 27 December 1979, after a violent, Soviet-engineered coup that ousted President Hafizullah Amin. Babrak holds the three most important political positions in the country: he is President of the Revolutionary Council (chief of state), Prime Minister (head of the government), and secretary general of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Since assuming power in Kabul he has attempted to broaden his domestic political base by including some military leaders and some non-Communist civilians in his Cabinet and on the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council (the main executive body). These moves are unlikely to be enough to win him the support of the general populace (which opposes Soviet intervention in Afghanistan), however, and he will continue to depend on Soviet military support for the survival of his government. (b)(3)

The Road to Power in Kabul

Babrak is a veteran Communist whose leftwing activities began when he was a student at Kabul University in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Arrested in 1952 for leftist agitation on campus, he spent the next five years in jail, where he renewed an earlier acquaintance with Afghanistan's leading Communist theoretician, Mir Akbar Khaibar, who had been imprisoned for subversion. Under Khaibar's tutelage, Babrak became an active Communist, and he joined the PDPA when it was formed in 1965. The PDPA split in 1967 because of personality clashes and differences over party strategy among its leaders. Babrak and his followers, who favored increased political agitation, formed the Parcham (Banner) faction, while the more cautious Nur Mohammad Taraki and his supporters formed the Khalq (People) faction. Believing that a united party could more forcefully oppose the regime of President Mohammad Daoud, Babrak led the Parchamists back into the party in 1977 after agreeing to serve as vice chairman while Taraki became party head. (b)(3)

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In April 1978 Babrak was one of three PDPA members—the others were Taraki and his fellow Khalq faction member Hafizullah Amin—who emerged as leaders of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan after the coup that overthrew Daoud and established a Marxist regime. Taraki became President and Prime Minister, while Amin was named Foreign Minister and a vice prime minister. Babrak became vice chairman of the Revolutionary Council and a vice prime minister along with Amin. (b)(3)

During the spring and summer of 1978 Taraki and other Khalq leaders, including Amin, began to consolidate their power. They were particularly concerned with limiting the influence of Babrak and the Parchamists, who were calling for closer ties to the Soviet Union. In July 1978 Taraki directed a party purge that led to the removal of Parchamists from key government and PDPA positions. Babrak was exiled as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia and was removed from the PDPA Central Committee. In September 1978 he was ordered home to stand trial on charges of coup plotting. He did not return to Kabul, however, but dropped out of sight. One report indicates that during 1979 he made several trips to Moscow. By the time the ambitious Amin had succeeded in ousting Taraki in September 1979, Babrak had still not returned to public life. In late 1979 the Soviets apparently determined that Amin was losing control of Afghanistan and decided that Babrak, the pro-Soviet leader of the Parcham faction of the PDPA, was the logical choice to succeed Amin. Sometime before late December they summoned Babrak to Moscow to inform him of his impending installation as President and Prime Minister of Afghanistan. (b)(3)

Soviet Puppet

Before the April 1978 coup, most Afghan observers had difficulty assessing Babrak, but they generally concluded that he was little more than a front man for Khaibar, (b)(1) (b)(3)

Until Khaibar was killed in April 1978 (perhaps by Muslim extremists), Babrak depended on him for his intellectual inspiration, and Babrak has never won respect as a thinker in his own right. (b)(1) (b)(3)

In the months immediately after the 1978 coup he proved to be less astute than the scholarly Taraki or the ruthless (b)(1) (b)(3) Babrak managed to survive the power struggle that followed Marxist revolution, however, largely because he relied on the guidance and support of the Soviets. (b)(3)

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Over the years Babrak's publicly expressed attitude toward the United States has fluctuated with the Soviet line. After the 1978 coup, he expressed his admiration for the American people and for the great contribution the American Revolution had made to the cause of democracy. In the aftermath of the December 1979 coup, however, he embarked on a virulent anti-US propaganda campaign designed to divert attention from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Because he must depend on the Soviet Union for military support and political guidance, Babrak will probably closely follow Soviet direction in his relations with the United States. (b)(1) (b)(3) (b)(3)

In his relations with neighboring Pakistan, Babrak may attempt to exploit his Pushtun background. He is a native of Pushtunistan, a large tribal area that straddles over 400 miles of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The Pushtuns have demanded autonomy for many years, and in the past Babrak has spoken in favor of a separate Pushtunistan. He may now rekindle tribal demands for autonomy in an attempt to stir up Pushtun insurgency in the Pakistani portion of the region, hoping that unrest in the area will make it easier for Afghanistan to extend its eastern frontier to include all of Pushtunistan or for the Soviets to move beyond the Afghan border and establish a puppet state of Pushtunistan. (b)(3)

Early Life and Career

Babrak Karmal was born in 1929 in Kanary into a prominent Pushtun family that may have been related to the late President Daoud. His father is Lt. Gen. (ret.) Mohammad Hussein Khan, who was Governor General of Paktia Province for an unknown length of time before 1975. Babrak graduated from the German-language Nejat High School in Kabul in 1948 and entered the Faculty of Law of Kabul University in 1949. After his release from jail in 1956, he completed his law studies and graduated in 1957. During 1957-58 he served in the Army, and from 1958 to 1965 he was a minor official in the Ministry of Planning. (b)(3)

Babrak ran for a seat in the Wolesi Jirgah (lower house of parliament) in September 1965 and won. Parliament provided him with the opportunity to display his skills as an orator and his talents as a political tactician. In October 1965 he was the instigator of antigovernment student disorders that resulted in the fatal shootings of several students and the resignation of the Prime Minister. In November 1966 Babrak and fellow Deputies Nur Ahmad Nur (now a member of the Revolutionary Council) and Anahita Ratebzad (now Minister of

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Education) were severely beaten in the Wolesi Jirgah by conservative deputies; Babrak was hospitalized for six weeks, thereby winning the sympathy of university students. He was reelected to the Wolesi Jirgah in September 1969, after a lively campaign in which he was actively supported by students. (b)(3)

Babrak again found himself in the limelight in July 1971. Using a confidence debate over the appointment of a new prime minister as a reason to take the floor, he delivered an 80-minute speech, in which he made countless denunciations of the King and the royal family; praised the beneficence of the USSR; singled out the United States for special attack, blaming it for all of Afghanistan's economic ills; and urged a new militancy in support of autonomy for Pushtunistan (Babrak was probably not so much concerned with his people's desire for autonomy as with using their demands to strengthen his attack on the government). In other speeches Babrak criticized the Durand Line (the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan), insisting that Afghanistan had never recognized it and never would. He also attacked the Afghan Industrial Development Bank, which he called "evil capitalism incarnate." In March 1973 he led what may have been the largest demonstration in the history of Afghanistan to protest the Iran-Afghanistan agreement to share the waters of the Helmand River, which he believed favored Iran. Babrak's harangues both in and out of parliament stirred his listeners, and he became better known than the Prime Minister of the moment. His career as a deputy ended when parliament was dissolved after the 1973 coup that replaced the monarchy with a constitutional republic under Mohammad Daoud. Babrak refrained from public activity until April 1978, when he made an emotional speech at the funeral of his mentor Khaibar. A short time later he was one of seven Central Committee members arrested in a Communist purge by the Daoud regime. (b)(3)

Personal Data

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He speaks Dari and English, some German, and limited Pushtu.

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Babrak has five brothers. Two, are active Communists.

Babrak is married and has four children,

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He and Minister of Education Anahita Ratebzad have been lovers since 1960. She was Ambassador to Yugoslavia while Babrak was in Prague. Ratebzad, who is about 50, is the estranged (perhaps divorced) wife of Babrak's uncle, Dr. Karamuddin Kakar, who was dean of the Medical College of Kabul University during 1972-75.

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